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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 004066

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IS](#) [PHUM](#) [ECONOMY](#) [AND](#) [FINANCE](#) [ISRAELI](#) [SOCIETY](#)

SUBJECT: THREE BEDOUIN MOSQUES IN THE NEGEV ORDERED  
DEMOLISHED

Classified By: DCM Gene A. Cretz for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The GOI has served demolition orders for three mosques built in Bedouin unrecognized villages in the Negev. The regional council for the Bedouin, an Israeli-Arab NGO, is taking action to publicize the threat to these mosques as a means of pressuring the GOI to back off on the demolition. One of these orders was issued by the Regional Planning and Building Committee in the Negev, which administers the Al-Dhiyya village. According to a GOI source, the committee was "unaware" the structure it had marked for demolition was a mosque. He said the committee is therefore taking steps to work with Bedouin authorities to resolve the "code violations" that led to the issuance of the demolition order for this mosque, but that the Bedouin have yet to take the corrective actions specified. A Bedouin council contact said GOI has not rescinded the demolition orders and "nothing has changed." END SUMMARY.

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Sawalha: Demolitions Will Turn Bedouin Against Israel  
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12. (C) The continuous discussion between the GOI and the Bedouin in the Negev over unrecognized villages sharpened recently when the GOI issued orders for municipal authorities to destroy three mosques. (Note: The GOI strictly regulates all construction throughout Israel via various local and national bodies, and has for years attempted to prevent construction in the numerous "unrecognized" villages that Bedouin have built throughout the northern Negev. In addition, the GOI has for decades attempted to settle Bedouin in GOI-planned villages. As part of this effort, official bodies rarely approve building permits for structures outside government approved areas. End Note). On April 25, Faisal Sawalha of the Regional Council for Unrecognized Villages in the Negev contacted Econoff regarding what he said are demolition orders, issued by the Ministry of Interior and the Bni Shimon Regional Council in the Negev, against three mosques located in the unrecognized villages of Um Al-Hiran, Tel Al-Maleh, and Al-Dhiyya that together serve more than 2,050 Bedouin. All three mosques were built without permits.

13. (C) Sawalha said that the Um Al-Hiran Mosque is not only to be demolished, but residents of the village are also required to pay a fine of 30,000 shekels. In Tel Al-Maleh, the district court has returned the case to a lower court for review, he said, while in Al-Dhiyya, the demolition order issued by the Regional Planning and Building Committee stands and must be implemented this year.

14. (C) The involved villages have mobilized a public relations campaign to save the mosques. Sawalha said he has approached the local Bedouin committee in each village to exchange ideas on how to deal with this matter, and has informed Arab members of the Knesset. On April 22, Israeli Arabs from Galilee, Tel Aviv, and other townships in the Negev gathered at the Um Al-Hiran mosque for Friday prayers as a sign of protest. Sawalha said this is not the first time demolition orders have been issued: "Two mosques were demolished in 2003," one in Tel Al-Maleh and another in the village of Al-Za'roora. These two mosques were built without permits.

15. (C) On May 23, Sawalha told Econoff that the GOI was moving ahead with the demolition orders, citing licensing violations with the mosques. He also said that demolitions will "fuel extremist cause" (sic) within the Bedouin community.

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Ritov: Building Codes Must Be Adhered To  
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16. (C) On May 10, Econoff spoke to Amir Ritov, chairman of the Regional Planning and Building Committee, about the Al-Dhiyya demolition order. Ritov said when the Al-Dhiyya mosque was built, incorrect documentation was filed, which did not indicate the structure's religious nature. As the structure did not fall within appropriate "code and permit" parameters, he said, the committee was required to issue a demolition order. When the committee was informed of the building's purpose, his organization was "lenient," he said, informing the village to "fix" deficiencies to bring the structures into compliance with appropriate building codes.

Ritov claimed that in the months since Al-Dhiyya village was informed about the deficiencies the village has not taken any corrective action.

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Comment: Demolitions An Ongoing Issue  
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17. (C) The ongoing issue of demolitions continues to be a point of contention between the GOI and the unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev as each side paints a different picture to outside observers. GOI counterparts within the Ministry of Interior have not responded to Post questions regarding the pending demolitions.

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